



FIRE COMMISSION

City and County of San Francisco

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RAYMOND G. CONNORS, JR., *Secretary*

April 6, 1984

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Mayor, City and County of San Francisco
Room 200, City Hall
San Francisco, CA 94102

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Dear Mayor Feinstein:

The Mayor's Special Committee on Hotel Fire Safety has completed its investigation and is herewith submitting its report, detailing its findings and recommendations.

The Committee has reviewed current code requirements and evaluated their effectiveness in fire safety and protection of the public in an effort to avert a tragedy of the magnitude of the Cathedral Hill Hotel fire.

The most vital recommendations found in the report are:

1. All public areas of hotels must be provided with sprinkler protection.
2. Smoke detectors should be installed in all hotel and motel guest rooms.
3. Door closers should be installed in all guest rooms.

The enclosed report was adopted on a motion by Douglas Cornford, Executive Director of the Hotel Employers Association of San Francisco, and seconded by Emmet Condon, Chief of Department, and endorsed by the Committee, with one abstention.

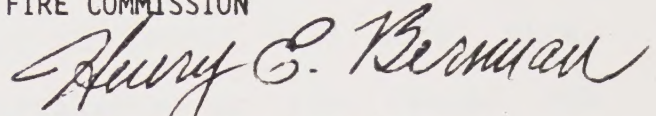
It is the consensus of the Mayor's Special Committee on Hotel Fire Safety that the recommendations contained in this report be implemented at the earliest possible moment. To that end, several members of the Committee have expressed their eagerness to assist in the preparation of amendments to the San Francisco Building/Housing Code.

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It is our sincere belief that the code amendments outlined in the report will make San Francisco one of the safest cities in the Country for hotel and motel guests, and serve as a role model and leader for the whole country.

Very truly yours,

FIRE COMMISSION

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Henry E. Berman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Henry" and last name "Berman" clearly legible.

Henry E. Berman, President
Chairman, Mayor's Special Committee
on Hotel Fire Safety

EDC:ff

Enclosure

cc: Committee Members


REPORT OF MAYOR'S SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON HOTEL FIRE SAFETY

Introduction

To date, the Mayor's Special Committee on Hotel Fire Safety has met five times. It has reviewed a large amount of data and information, including, among other things, the SFFD reports on the recent Cathedral Hill Hotel fire, statistics and information pertaining to the causes and characteristics of various fires, information and data relating to different fire prevention and fire suppression measures, and information concerning numerous other issues pertaining to the level of fire safety in San Francisco's hotels and motels. In addition, the various members of the Committee have considerable expertise in such areas as fire prevention and fire suppression, building codes and building standards, hotel and motel characteristics and operations, and health. The Committee members have drawn on this expertise with respect to the matters set forth in this Preliminary Statement.

Fire Safety in San Francisco's Hotels and Motels

The recent Cathedral Hill Hotel fire has focused attention on the level of fire safety in San Francisco's hotels and motels. Both governmental officials and the city's lodging industry recognize the need to analyze the level of hotel/motel fire safety provided by current San Francisco codes and, if needed, to make changes in those codes to enhance that level of fire safety as appropriate.



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The Committee recognizes, further, that due to San Francisco's age, diverse building techniques and types of structures, limited geographic size, and mix of occupancies, it is perhaps unique among other communities with respect to hotel/motel fire safety. The hotel and motel operators of San Francisco are anxious to take steps as are deemed appropriate to enhance the level of fire safety in their establishments.

The Committee is also cognizant of the extremely important role that the lodging industry plays in the overall welfare of the City and County of San Francisco. Without its substantial stock of quality hotel and motel accommodations, San Francisco would not have the continuing influx of large numbers of tourists and visitors which it presently enjoys. This would result in sharply reduced employment opportunities (particularly for unskilled, youthful, and minority workers), the loss of substantial numbers of dollars which the city's hotel and motel guests spend on numerous goods and services, the marked reduction in sales, payroll, and gross receipts taxes, and a significant reduction in the hotel tax, which is used to fund a wide variety of programs in San Francisco. Both San Francisco's lodging industry and governmental officials are concerned, therefore, not only with providing a proper level of fire safety in the city's hotels and motels, but also with confirming to all visitors and tourists that San Francisco's

hotels and motels are among the safest of any city's in the United States.

Thus, the Committee views the matter of fire safety in San Francisco's hotels and motels as being one which requires joint effort and cooperation on the part of both the city and its lodging industry.

Overview of Committee's Conclusions

The work of the Committee to date has shown that by far the most significant risk of serious loss of life or injury in hotel/motel fires is that presented by fires which originate in public areas. This is true for several reasons: Generally, such areas are large and open, and therefore often they do not provide the compartmentalization of small areas which significantly reduces the risk involved in the spread of fires. Also, the public areas of hotels and motels often contain large fuel loads which can significantly increase the intensity of fires. Public areas often also serve as means of egress from other areas of a hotel or motel, and therefore it is important that the risk of fire in such areas be reduced as much as possible. In addition, due to the relatively large size of many public areas and the presence of large fuel loads, the amount of smoke and toxic substances generated by fires in public areas substantially increases the risk of loss of life and injury throughout the establishment to guests and employees as well as to responding emergency personnel. Finally,

public areas often contain large numbers of people, and this presents an added risk.

These risks are not present to the same degree with respect to other areas of a hotel or motel, such as, for example, guest rooms. These areas, however, have been reviewed by the Committee to determine the level of fire safety to occupants of these areas.

Based on its analysis, the Committee has concluded, therefore, that the appropriate course of action would be to reduce the hazard of fire in the public areas of hotels and motels. The best way to reduce that hazard is to sprinkle those areas. Based on its analysis, the Committee has further concluded that a material increase in the level of fire safety in the guest rooms themselves would be achieved if smoke detectors were installed in each hotel or motel guest room unit, and if door closers (or the equivalent) were installed in each guest room unit.

The Committee feels that such steps would be a very significant and efficient means of greatly reducing the risk of serious loss of life or injury in the city's lodging establishments. In point of fact, such measures would make San Francisco's hotels and motels substantially safer in terms of fire safety than the hotels and motels in almost any other city in the country.

Therefore, it is the conclusion of the Committee that appropriate steps be taken to require (1) the sprinklering

of the public areas of the city's hotels and motels, and (2) the installation of smoke detectors in hotel and motel guest rooms. If such action is to be taken, several issues which must be addressed have been identified by the Committee, and those are discussed below.

Issues to Be Addressed

A. Financial Impediments

As noted above, the Committee has concluded that the dependency of the city's welfare on its lodging industry is such that the city and its lodging establishments should work together toward the goal of increased hotel/motel fire safety. Therefore, the Committee recommends that a variety of measures be adopted to expedite and facilitate the installation of sprinkler systems in the public areas of San Francisco's hotels and motels. Such measures should include, as a minimum, either a rollback in assessed value or a prohibition against an increase in the assessed value of affected properties with respect to real property taxes, an exemption from the city's sales tax for materials purchased for these sprinkler systems, and a reduction in the city's payroll/gross receipts tax for affected establishments. In addition, the city should support efforts at the state level to achieve property tax relief, income tax relief (in the form of franchise tax credits or deductions), and state sales tax relief with respect to such sprinkler systems.

Moreover, it is obvious that the installation of such sprinkler systems represents a substantial economic commitment

by the city's hotels and motels. More important, however, the Committee has concluded that there exist substantial economic burdens and impediments over and above the cost represented by purchasing and installing such systems and the attendant loss of revenues and taxes. Specifically, the cost to hotels and motels in terms of Water Department charges for connecting sprinkler systems to the city's water supply are substantial. This work is done by the Water Department at night, and therefore premium wages must be paid. Moreover, Water Department charges for overhead, equipment, and the like are substantial and represent a significant impediment, as do large Water Department meter inspection charges related to sprinkler systems. The Committee is of the view that these burdens and impediments should be removed, and that this can be done without a substantial adverse impact on the city.

Resolution of these financial issues is a necessary prerequisite to the accomplishment of the goal recommended herein by the Committee.

B. Materials to Be Permitted in Sprinkler Systems

A variety of materials are available for use in sprinkler systems, but they vary substantially not only in terms of the cost of purchase and installation, but also in terms of the amount of time needed for installation. This latter consideration is of particular importance in that the use of some materials apparently can greatly reduce

the amount of time needed for installation and, therefore, the amount of time which hotels and motels must put affected areas out of service for installation purposes. The longer such spaces are out of service, the greater the loss in terms of guest revenues and in terms of the city's hotel tax receipts. Therefore, the Committee feels that all approved suitable available materials should be permitted for use in such sprinkler systems.

C. Period Needed for Installation of Sprinkler Systems

Given the magnitude of the commitment of time, money, and other resources required to implement the action recommended by the Committee, it is important that a reasonable, sufficient period of time be provided to San Francisco's existing lodging establishments to complete the installation of sprinkler systems in their public areas. The Committee is of the view that a period of three years should be given from the date of the adoption of the appropriate ordinance. Recognizing the fact that San Francisco's hotels and motels are of various ages and represent a wide variety of building types, each with unique characteristics, the Committee also feels that officials should grant extensions of up to two additional years within which to comply if good cause is shown. This procedure was utilized in the implementation of the state's high-rise retroactive fire safety regulations.

Because the implementation of the Committee's recommended action will depend on the availability of the financial measures outlined above, the Committee further feels and recommends that in the event that such measures are not available as of the date of the adoption of the ordinance in question -- as, for example, if state or city action has not been completed with respect to property tax, and other, relief as of the date the ordinance is adopted -- the commencement of the implementation period should be delayed until such measures are all in place.

Conclusion

The foregoing is not intended to represent an exhaustive analysis of all of the issues involved in this matter or an all-inclusive statement of the views of the Committee or of its respective members. Further, the Committee has not completed its work, and therefore the matters set forth above must be recognized as being only a preliminary statement of the views, conclusions, and recommendations of the Committee. Finally, it is important to keep in mind that the success of any measures recommended by the Committee will depend in large part on the successful interaction of the various City and County of San Francisco agencies and officials involved in such an effort, the successful coordination of efforts on the city and state levels, and, perhaps most important, the successful interaction between all levels of government and San Francisco's hotels and motels.

The Committee feels strongly that a unique opportunity exists to materially increase the level of fire safety in San Francisco's hotels and motels, to the benefit of both the city and its lodging establishments, and that full advantage should be taken of this opportunity.

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